

"The Land in which they live"

When a person despairs of the situation in which he finds himself and seeks relief, he is unable to analyze objectively the society to which he looks for sanctuary. In fact initially, it probably doesn't matter what the new environment is like as long as it is different and less restrictive than the one from which he is escaping. Only after some months of exposure to the novel situation will such an individual begin to see the day to day realities. At first he revels in the freedom of having left the unpleasant and punishing circumstances and sees the present culture only in terms of assistance and superficialities - much as the newly weds who as yet have not faced the frustrations of everyday living.

This new environment was not chosen accidentally, it was well advertized as one in which the dissenter could find freedom of expression and flexibility of action. This country has been considered by some as the leader in "free thinking" and what appears to be uninhibited behavior. It would seem to tolerate political independence as well. Its people have been glamorized as the personification of "advanced thought". The country itself has rare physical beauty, and is known as the "Venice of the North". Its women are admired internationally. Thus we have a picture of a grand terrain setting and beautiful people acting as a magnet to the "disenchanted", the disaffected. A particularly suitable land in which to seek the true meaning of life and to explore appropriate action for the future.

It should be obvious that the above description is a setting in which one should examine the defection of several young Americans from the Armed Forces. They have given up their homes and families and chosen Sweden as a place to live for a variety of reasons. This paper will not concentrate on this matter but will be concerned with an examination of their

present location and impressions of what this environment will do to their thinking and eventual actions.

These views are based on a brief visit to Stockholm and only indirect contact with the defectors. The impressions in reality are a psychological assessment of what may happen to people when they find themselves in the process of an ideological change in a situation totally different from their past experience.

The city itself has a personality with which one must reckon. It is not just a collection of buildings and people. It seems to be a unique combination of the old and the new--a blend of antiquity and the modern, presented in a meaningful and dramatic fashion. The city's sub-culture seems to reflect elements of the past present and future, particularly in the people who wander through the parks and on the broad sidewalks. They represent the conservative, the hippie, the foreigner, the alcoholic, and the unclassifiable. They seem to pass each other without notice except for their own kind. There is no mixing, no recognition of other parties in the scene but their own "species". There is a curious encapsulation of each group as if they were on a planet of their own. It is reminiscent of a population of a mental hospital ward, where each goes about in their own private world.

This general feeling of non-interaction in the Swedish people is fundamental to the essence of this paper and I believe to the atmosphere in which the young Americans are now living. Perhaps the Swedish culture has molded this trait in its people or experience of the country has been such that this behavior seems to be an underlying major factor in understanding the direction in which these people seem to have gone. The Swedish public image is one of free expression and action and yet there appears to be little notice of such behavior. Perhaps such "freedom" is permitted because psychologically it is not seen or comprehended in a very personal sense. The Swede maybe a non-interactor who can permit dissent and different views where people of another culture would become too involved to tolerate such disagreement. Like a chemical catalyst, this culture promotes interaction without be-

More on this topic later.

The initial thoughts of Stockholm center on the expenses of everyday living (unless the native can find shops the visitor cannot). A package of cigarettes cost anywhere from .95¢ to 1.20. A bottle of scotch about \$ 14.00. Food also seemed higher than many cities in the U.S. and in other parts of Europe. It would appear therefore that the cost of living might far exceed the meager income of a displaced person who is by law unable to work for the first few months of his time in country. The amount of funds granted by the government is small and certainly would need to be supplemented either through gifts or activities that would be at best somewhat beyond the letter of the law. If the individual must accept dole or charity to exist on an inadequate level , it is not a set of conditions that are conducive to feeling independent and comfortable. On the other hand if he does not accept and live on such assistance, he may be forced to consider less legal means of support. Although his rejection of the Armed Forces cannot be considered truly an illegal act, it is a step of non-conformity along a continuum which could lead to other activities that eventually would oppose more orthodox laws i.e. drug traffic, gray or black market exchanges. There is some indication that the part of the population most sympathetic to these Americans also may presently participate in such activities. This is not to label the group as criminal in the ordinary sense but they are certainly the least conforming group of this sub-culture.

The anti-Vietnam section of the Swedish youth seems much like our own group. Somehow however the Swedish youth seem more active and to devote full time to their specific protests. At the same time they seem to be less noticed by the rest of society who appears to be doing their own "thing" without concern for anyone else's "thing". All these "things" seem to be done very publically but without seemingly affecting anyone not immediately involved. It's like a stage with people acting intensely while the audience is out for intermission.

The free-wheeling reputation of Stockholm seems misleading to the author. Perhaps as advertized, there is no punishment for behavior that is non-conforming, but at the same time, there is little attention or reward given it either. Thus it is being psychologically isolated from most parts of the populations that in other cultures would at least argue the point or "care" at least a little. No reaction from someone is like behaving in a vacuum. In addition one eventually tires of the same people and the same group, particularly if the general group behavior is having no influence on others. Historically the Swedish people have exhibited this isolation syndrome, not so much to avoid trouble but rather because they (The Swede) is "naturally" non-involvement oriented. They are truly a private society, or perhaps they might be called a "non-society" - they are individuals living in a physical environment but internally focussed. Their concern for external events is carefully controlled and unlike the American social group, they can withdraw without being disturbed if they are unable to modify the behavior of others. Thus their tolerance is greater than ours because their psychological commitment is less. Some would consider this a more mature attitude but the author suspects that it is really not on a maturity continuum but rather reflects a need for greater protection from external change.

It would appear therefore that the young Americans searching for a new life may in time find that Sweden offers them less involvement and human commitment than they desire. They may also tire of that part of the population which has offered them aid because their aims probably will not, in the long run, conform to the more provincial views of this group. Additionally the lack of effect on this society in general maybe an overwhelming depressent to the Americans, while the Swede who to a degree understands it, can tolerate it.

There are cultures in which the Americans would feel more at home but the cultures of Sweden and China seem to be basically poor selections. Such societies do not require the Americans'

need for reinforcement, nor his dependence on the stimulation of others. The old expression of the "dumb Swede" is simply inaccurate. It is not a lack of intelligence but a lack of involvement that caused him to behave in that fashion. He is truly self-centered but not selfishly, rather he is a psychological isolate.

Whether or not these young Americans will return to the U.S., is unknown but the author strongly believes that the Swedish culture will not offer them a psychologically gratifying environment in which to live, and that if the psychic cost is not too great they will seek a home back in the U.S. or in other more "involved" quarters of the globe.

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